SPEECH BY
IRWIN COTLER
MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL OF CANADA

FORUM ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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Thank you, Art Hagopian, for those kind words of introduction. It's good to meet up with you again in common cause. Indeed, I am pleased to participate in this joint endeavour with the Canadian Ethno-Cultural Council-with whom I have been associated almost since its founding-in combating racism, xenophobia, exclusion, and other forms of intolerance, as well as in working to preserve and pronounce our multicultural heritage-indeed, in promoting multiculturalism as a constitutional norm. I think we sometimes forget that it's set forth in Section 27 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

I also want to say in reference to hate crimes-to just repeat for this group what I had occasion to say in the House last week-that hate crime against any identifiable group constitutes an assault on the inherent integrity and worth of the human person. It constitutes an assault on the equal dignity of all persons. It constitutes an assault on the rights of minorities and constitutes an assault on the fragility of our multicultural democracy.

In the House of Commons, we recently passed a unanimous resolution condemning anti-Semitism. And I stated on behalf of the Government that we will not be silent: we will bring the requisite moral, political, and juridical leadership to bear to combat hate crimes. Just last week, under the leadership of Jean Augustine, we approved a national action plan against racism and we will now be putting that plan in effect against hate crimes and in our common struggle against racism and all forms of intolerance in this country.

I am pleased also to be here in the company of other groups and NGOs who are associated with this conference. Reference has been made to them and as the names were identified, I felt I was back in my own riding because each of the groups has its counterpart in Mont-Royal, le comté que je représente. It's an arc-en-ciel, as I call it-a rainbow riding. It's a mini-United Nations! It is not what the media sometimes stereotypes it to be. It may have been that once-"the Anglophone riding" of Montreal. But anybody who still says that has just not visited that riding because if you walk through it-Côte-des-Neiges, etc.-you will see that wonderful multicultural expression of the best of diversity in our country.

I am delighted also that NDP leader Jack Layton is here. We broke bread together last week at a National Prayer Breakfast here in Ottawa and, as I mentioned to him, I sometimes would like to see the civility of the National Player Breakfast make its way into Question Period in the House of Commons! But I am not sure that is going to happen!

I am delighted also to see Victor Malarek here. I'm one of the people who have been the beneficiary of his compelling work, The Natashas. It's in my office, right on my desk, to serve as a reminder of what brings us here together today.

And I am delighted, therefore, to be able to open this forum and to participate in the common cause that brings us together this evening: the struggle against the scourge of human trafficking, against this persistent and pervasive assault on human rights, against the commodification in human beings-human beings being regarded as cattle to be bartered and bonded-and of this struggle against trafficking as part of the larger struggle for human rights and human dignity.

What we are dealing with here today is the enslavement of human beings-a global slave trade, as Victor's book describes it; treating human beings as goods to be bought and sold, and forced to work-usually in the sex trade, but also as agricultural labourers or in sweat shops, for little or no money.

Through the dedicated efforts of Professor Harold Koh (former Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Democracy and Labor in the US State Department) and Radhika Coomataswamy (former United Nations Special Rapporteur with regards to violence against women), through their work and others, we now have a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of this global sex trade. We know that this grotesque trade in human life generates upwards of $10 billion a year. We know that trafficking is so profitable that it is the world's fastest growing international crime. We know that a majority of traffickers are girls and women under the age of 25.

It is a sad reality that many trafficking victims are young people, sometimes children. All of them are desperate to secure the necessities of life. Instead, their lives are ruined by exploitation rooted in greed.

Each of you here in this room-by sharing your insight, experience, information, and expertise-can help us develop the comprehensive approach we need.

But we have to start thinking outside of silos: thinking of human trafficking as an abstract or faceless problem, or thinking of this as some kind of abstraction, or thinking of it as a criminal law problem, as a law enforcement problem, as an economic problem, as an immigration problem, or as a public health problem. It is each and all of these.

For trans-border trafficking is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that challenges law enforcement officials, flouts all immigration laws, and threatens to spread global disease.

But the important point here is that behind each and all of these problems is a human face-is a human being-and trafficking constitutes an assault on our common humanity. Accordingly, it must be seen first and foremost as a human rights problem with a human face-as being the very antithesis of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. As Professor Harold Koh put it, and I quote: "By their acts, traffickers deny that all persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They deny their victims freedom of movement, freedom of association, and the most basic freedom to have a childhood."

What can we do? I would like to briefly outline a few of our current efforts and initiatives. The first one must be a preventive one: to prevent trafficking to begin with; to raise awareness, as Victor's book has done, of this new global slave trade and of the urgency to take immediate action against trafficking; of the urgent need to raise our voices in international and domestic fora like this one; of making it clear that this is a priority for us-that trafficking can be prevented if we mobilize a constituency of conscience both domestically and internationally.

I am pleased as well that we now have a poster for raising awareness and serving as a call to action. This poster will be widely distributed and will go a long way to making sure that Canadians across the country realize that this modern slavery is not something "out there" that doesn't touch us. It's something that exists here in Canada; and it not only touches us, but is part of an international connecting link-an assault for which we will need, as I say, a comprehensive strategy of cross-commitment.

The poster also clearly states that human trafficking is a serious crime. That is why, as a second initiative, we will be reviewing the *Criminal Code* with a view to enacting new provisions that will address the specific offence of trafficking as a *Criminal Code* offence-that will enhance the legislative provisions that deal with trafficking and that will bring the perpetrators to justice.

Third, we're also co-chairing with Foreign Affairs a federal interdepartmental working group on trafficking in persons. I know that sounds like "bureaucratie," but one of the international recommendations for combating trafficking is that every government establish a focal point-a coordinated focal point to bring all the various departments and agencies together. And this interdepartmental working group has now become, for the first time, the official focal point in the fight against human trafficking in Canada. The working group will have an express mandate to develop a comprehensive anti-trafficking federal strategy, and issues raised in forums like this should help to inform the working group in their efforts in this regard.

Fourth, the RCMP will be expanding and intensifying their work both domestically and internationally and, among other initiatives, will be establishing an international human trafficking investigative unit that will operate both domestically and internationally.

Fifth, I will be engaging my provincial and territorial colleagues in order to enhance inter-agency and inter-jurisdictional collaboration.

This topic will be on my list as I go into our next federal/provincial/territorial meeting here at home, and I have been already raising this matter in the discussions with counterpart Attorneys General.

Sixth, I will be working with international counterparts to enhance existing legislative tools to combat human trafficking across national borders and to address the root causes of this problem in the country of origin. In particular, we will continue to work with the Government of the United States in our approach to this crisis. I am hoping to meet soon with US Attorney General John Ashcroft. A meeting of this kind was postponed because he had some serious pancreatic surgery, as you know. But we will be meeting soon to enhance our collaborative efforts in this regard.

Finally, solving this most profound of human rights assaults-of assaults on human dignity-requires a comprehensive approach; an approach that will allow us to prevent the problems to begin with, as I described, to protect the victims who are sometimes forgotten, to bring the perpetrators to justice, to address the issue from both an international and a domestic perspective, and to build partnerships between governments, parliamentarians, NGOs, and all stakeholders involved in this effort.

In this, we have common cause, and by working together, we can create a critical mass of advocacy on behalf of that common cause.

I don't have to tell anyone in this room that human trafficking is a global problem. It affects all countries including Canada. The Government will do its part, but we know we have some distance to go.

And so, this partnership is essential.

I regret that I cannot remain for the duration of your deliberations. In my life as a law professor, I had the luxury of being able to do so-at least most of the time-and benefit from the direct exchanges of participants. But my officials will be here. They will be participating in the deliberations. They will be reporting to me to ensure that I can be the full beneficiary of your views.

I look forward to hearing the recommendations that are put forward in this meeting and also appreciate your commitment to putting a stop to this terrible crime. We overcame the slave trade

in the 19th century and together we can make Canada a moral, political, and juridical leader in the struggle for human dignity against trafficking in the 21st century.

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